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## HOSPITALITY

**VOLUME 23 NUMBER 3 APRIL 2010**

Hospitality is about more than offering coffee and wearing a name badge. It's an attitude of open-heartedness.

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VOICES

## My dad was born in

Poland around 1930. As a boy in the early '40s, he was one of the 12 million people the Nazis forced to work as unpaid labor in camps and on farms. When the war finally ended he was only a teenager—and one of the thousands of displaced people in Europe. Eventually he found a job working for the British army and then for the U.S. Army patrolling, on horseback, a munitions site deep in the forest.

My dad got to this country because of a Catholic relief agency—probably similar to the Lutheran World Federation—that helped people displaced by World War II relocate to new homes.

What does my dad's story have to do with hospitality? When the U.S. Army accepted him—even though he was too young and probably didn't meet many of their requirements—they took a risk that likely saved his life. At that time in Europe, there was a horrible famine; everywhere people were starving. That decision, that hospitality, meant that my dad had food and a place to sleep.

Hospitality may not seem risky, but it is. Hospitality says: You may not meet my expectations or "requirements," but I welcome you and want to know you. I'll make myself vulnerable by being authentic and will accept you with an open heart. I'll take you in.

In "Opening our Hearts," Nanette Sawyer writes, "When we are invitational, we will find that people respond to our openness and suddenly we are in position to welcome them. . . . Deeply welcoming someone means giving them

the gift of your full presence."

Women of the ELCA groups often wonder how to reach out to younger women. Diane Dardón, a campus pastor in northern Illinois, writes about that question in "One Relationship at a Time." She says, "A young woman who recently graduated from college was asked how Women of the ELCA could best engage her in the work and mission of the organization. She responded, 'I want genuine, authentic relationship.'"

Relationship is the key to life-changing, open-hearted welcome. In "Holy Hospitality," Maggie Rourk reminds us what it means when we welcome the stranger—especially the stranger who is newly baptized—into our congregations: "Even as we are renewed, restored, and resurrected each day in our baptism, we get to bring other people to the same place. So then, dear friends in the Lord, let us risk everything to say 'Welcome' to all who come to Christ."

Finally, in "Creature Kindness" Kim Winchell asks, "How might we begin to name and claim a hospitality that embraces all of God's creation?" As we remember Earth Day this month, let's think about what it would mean to extend hospitality to the earth and all living things.

Hospitality is more than offering a neighbor a cup of coffee and a doughnut; it is welcoming the newcomer with an open heart, and it can make a lasting difference in someone's life. 🌿

**Kate Sprutta Elliott** is editor of *Lutheran Woman Today*. You may email her at [LWT@elca.org](mailto:LWT@elca.org).

## Hospitality

by Kate Sprutta Elliott





GIVE US THIS DAY

## Friends Who Are Different

Pauline Frazier

**The Bible has much to** say about our ears. It says, "He that has ears, let him hear." But what if you are one of God's people who does not have the ability to hear?

In 1980, as president of the Women of the Church in the Maumee Valley Conference of the then American Lutheran Church in Northwestern Ohio, I received a telephone call from the mother of an 18-year-old boy who was hearing impaired. She asked, "Can't the Women of the Church do something to provide Sunday morning worship services for these precious people who cannot hear?" It was like Paul's Macedonian who pleaded, "Come over and help us" (Acts 16).

I did not take this call lightly. But what could I do? I went to our board. They empathized and provided funds to have a signing service twice a month.

I was elated, but how was I going to find a signer for these services? Then a light bulb went on in my head. I called a nearby university to see if a sign-language student might be interested.

God works in mysterious ways! Our first interpreter was the perfect person. She was a member of a Lutheran congregation, she knew the liturgy, both her parents were non-hearing, and she signed before she could talk.

I will never forget my feelings on that first Sunday signing service. I was nervous. How was I going to converse with this group of people?

But my fears were unfounded. The smiles, hugs, and love poured forth as

we worshiped the Lord together along with the hearing congregation. What a privilege it was to partake of the Lord's supper together.

I sat next to the young man whose mother had called me and was struck by his sense of humor. I found myself praying that God would take care of this young man and the rest of the group.

Our pens flew as we got to know each other. A former "Miss Deaf Ohio" was in attendance. She became a wonderful friend.

Now it is 2010. I have a lot of memories of that special day in 1980, and how thankful I am that I have kept in contact with all of these dear friends.

Our signing services lasted for a few years. Sad to say, the Women of the Church lost their fervor for this project. Thankfully, there is a congregation of deaf Lutherans in a nearby city, so their spiritual needs are met.

My husband and I were always pleased when these friends would drop over. We would chat over pie and coffee. Now I live alone, but their visits have not ceased.

Several years ago they took me out to dinner for my 86th birthday. They were amused when I showed them my new hearing aids.

What a difference a telephone call made. The love of our Lord and Savior has brought us together. Friends who are different? There is no difference. 🌸

**Pauline Frazier** is a lifelong member of Trinity Lutheran Church in Wauseon, Ohio. She is 91 years old.



# CREATURE KINDNESS

By Kim Winchell

Some kind of “hospitality gene” seems to be part of the makeup of most Lutheran women. A long, proud tradition exists of “church ladies” tending the kitchen at potlucks and funeral dinners, gathering items for Lutheran World Relief, sewing quilts, knitting prayer shawls, and hosting Sunday coffee hour.

The qualities of such hospitality are plain to see: serving God and loving the neighbor; sharing freely with others with no expectation of something in return; offering food, shelter, comfort, and kindness to those in need, whether they are family, friends, or strangers. It is the ELCA’s tagline, “God’s Work, Our Hands,” manifested in love, kindness, mercy, and compassion, shared with others.

We are also invited, blessed, called, and even challenged by God, to extend that gracious, welcoming circle of hospitality to *all* of creation.

Our daughters grew up knowing that we kept a designated “spider jar” in one of our kitchen cupboards. When they felt some urgent distress over finding a spider in their personal space, they’d call out, “Mommy! Daddy! Get the spider jar!”

When they were older, they would even fetch the jar themselves. It became our family custom to be hospitable to spiders. After all, they weren’t in the house to get us—they were just trying to catch and eat the other bugs that got in. We assumed that they would rather be outdoors.

The spider jar (chosen for its depth, to keep a spider from running up and out onto our hand), was, and still is, frequently used to gently catch the spider and let it back outside into the bushes. It has become second nature for us.

It’s a simple kindness that can be extended to all insects (most of them harmless). It’s appreciating that they, too, are God’s creations, with a beauty and uniqueness all their own. We really don’t have to squish every bug we see.

## A SACRED TRUST

It is well within our Christian vocation and identity to enlarge our vision and our hearts to know, love, and relate to all creation as welcome kin. Scripture and the witness of saints of the church tell us so. St. Francis





Assisi is a well-known model in that regard, but many others have grasped that truth.

*And what is a heart of mercy? The handling of the heart for all creation, for people, for birds, animals . . . and all creatures. In bringing them to mind, in beholding them, the eyes are filled with tears out of a great and powerful compassion that embraces the heart. And the heart softens, and it cannot bear to hear or see any kind of harm, or even the least sorrow, experienced by a creature. It is awakened in the heart without measure insofar as one becomes like God.* (Isaac of Syria, c. 700 AD)

. . . insofar as one becomes like God." Such an identity is part of our biblically understood birthright. We read in Genesis 1:20–27 of God's creation of all of the creatures, birds, fishes, etc. (and God's blessing thereof). The text also provides the theological concept that human-kind is made in the image of God.

Being made in the image of God shapes and calls forth how we are to relate to the rest of creation: We are to love it and care for it, even as God loves and cares for us.

God invited Adam to do the honors of naming all of the other creatures (Genesis 2:19–20). Through that gracious invitation, we are all shaped by God to be in relationship with our fellow crea-

tures. In Genesis 1 and 2—which are wonderfully illuminated in Psalms 8 and 104—humankind's dominion of creation is understood to be a sacred trust, a humbling responsibility, rooted in gratitude.

We and the rest of creation are meant to share together in God's blessings of life, fruitfulness, and a "matrix of grace" (as Joseph Sittler called it in his essay *A Theology for Earth*, 1954). Offering some manner of hospitality to the created world that sustains us seems like the least we could do.

Through the ages, however, human sin and arrogance have so often broken our relationship to creation. We have abused the sacred trust given to us as God's stewards. We have shirked the responsibility to lovingly tend creation. We have too often forgotten to be gracious and hospitable to our fellow creatures.

## RIGHT RELATIONSHIP

As we learn in the New Testament (Colossians 1:15–20; 2 Corinthians 5:17–19), Christ, through his death on the cross, reconciled "all things" (in Greek, *ta panta*) whether in heaven or on earth, and bestowed on us the capability to be in right relationship with God, with one another, and with the rest of creation.

How might we begin to name and claim a hospitality that embraces all of God's creation?

To name it, we could begin to share stories with one another of the ways in which we each offer hospitality to the natural world outside—or perhaps even within—our doors. Collecting and sharing these stories within our women's groups or congregations could be a fun, heart-warming, and educational activity for Earth Day.

Claiming hospitality to creation can run from personal acts to far-reaching advocacy. You can live out such hospitality in many ways: feeding birds, helping rehabilitate injured wildlife; picking up that earthworm on the hot sidewalk and placing it back on some moist soil; neutering stray animals; recycling in your home or church; and advocating for cleaner energy and action on climate change.

This commitment grows out of an attitude that understands God's love is for all of creation, and that we are invited into God's dream of *shalom*, where peaceable, gracious, compassionate, and hospitable relationship is the truest way of living in God's vast family of life on Earth.

Let us pray:

*O God, enlarge within us the sense of fellowship with all living things, our brothers the animals to whom thou gavest the earth as their home in common with us. We remember with shame that in the past we have exercised the*



*high dominion with ruthless cruelty so that the voice of the earth, which should have gone up to Thee in song, has been a groan of travail. May we realize that they live not for us alone, but for them-*

*selves and for Thee, and that they love the sweetness of life. Amen!*

A prayer of St. Basil the Great  
(c. 329–379) 🐛

**Kim Winchell** is a diaconal minister for Earthkeeping Education and Advocacy Ministries, ELCA North/West Lower Michigan Synod.

## WAYS TO START

Here are some activities you might try in your congregation to help nurture hospitality toward creation:

Host a "Critter I.D." contest to see how many animals, plants, birds, or bugs participants can name during a specified time-frame in their own backyards or on the church grounds. Take photos, draw them, or write a list on index cards. Give prizes for various categories or skill levels (such as stickers for smaller children). It can be harder to love that which we don't know, so get to know God's other creatures around you and share the findings in an eco-friendly way.

Organize a volunteer day at your local zoo or nature center.

Invite a wildlife rehabilitation group to offer a presentation or demonstration about their work.

Create posters or photo collections that illustrate care and kindness towards creation or its creatures (an activity that would be great for a youth group). Set up a display in your church to share these stories.

Sponsor a birdhouse (or bathhouse) building session. Learn about how bats are our allies and about bat houses at [www.batcon.org](http://www.batcon.org). Give the houses away to congregation members or put them up around the church grounds.

Develop a natural habitat area or garden on your church grounds—another great project for the youth.

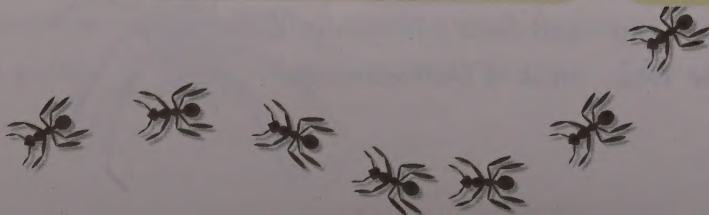
Host a "Blessing of Animals" service in your church (especially appropriate near St. Francis' Day on October 4). Let the neighborhood know about it.

See creation-related prayers on page 81 of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.

Present a dramatic group reading of the Douglas Wood book *Old Turtle* (Scholastic Press, 1992) and follow with a hymn such as "When Long Before Time." (ELW 861)

Other good hymns are "Touch the Earth Lightly" (ELW 739), "Great God, Your Love Has Called Us" (ELW 358), "God of the Sparrow" (ELW 740).

See the "Earth Day Sunday" (usually a weekend near April 22) resources at [www.nccecojustice.org](http://www.nccecojustice.org). Learn about a full "creation season," with themes/liturgies at [www.seasonofcreation.com](http://www.seasonofcreation.com).





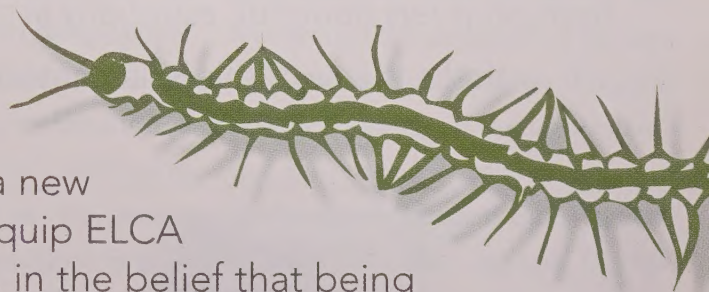
Grow sunflowers or other seed-bearing plants to help feed birds and wildlife; find out which flowers your local butterflies need.

Sponsor a pet food collection one Sunday and take the offerings to a local animal shelter.

Finally, have fun with all of this and take joy in it. Teach your children and the other young people you know how to be gentle and compassionate with all of God's creatures. Let their sense of awe and wonder at nature inspire your own spirit with remembered joys from your own childhood times in outdoor play and discovery. And may we all seek to be more open to the Holy Spirit's call and power working in us, and through us, to "renew the face of the ground" (Psalm 104:30) by extending some much-needed kindness, love, and simple hospitality, to all of God's creation.

## RESOURCES

Lutherans Restoring Creation (LRC) is a new initiative that seeks to empower and equip ELCA members for caring for God's creation, in the belief that being "earthkeepers" is foundational to our Christian vocation. Visit the Web site ([www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org](http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org)) for more information and a supply of hope, ideas, and encouragement.



See also:

[www.elca.org/caringforcreation](http://www.elca.org/caringforcreation) (the ELCA's social statement on environmental stewardship and other earthkeeping resources and links)

[www.elca.org/environment](http://www.elca.org/environment) (to learn about eco-issues addressed by the ELCA as well as advocacy opportunities)

[www.earthcharterinaction.org](http://www.earthcharterinaction.org) (to learn about and promote a sustainable Earth community)

For parents and children, to help nurture understanding, compassion, and hospitality towards nature: [www.sharingnature.com](http://www.sharingnature.com) and [www.naturerocks.org](http://www.naturerocks.org)

Additional help for worship and sermons:  
*Earth Prayers From Around the World*, Ed. Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon (HarperCollins, 1991)

*Earth & Word: Classic Sermons on Saving the Planet*, Ed. David Rhoads (Continuum, 2007)

Wonderful eco-quote collection:  
[www.stthomas.edu/recycle/quote.htm](http://www.stthomas.edu/recycle/quote.htm)

Learn about an upcoming retreat led by this author, "Greening our Spirits, Greening our World" June 28-July 4. Go to [www.ghostanch.org](http://www.ghostanch.org).



# Paul's World: Friendship

by Sarah Henrich

## EDITOR'S NOTE:

This is an excerpt from the Leader Guide for this year's Bible study, "To God's Beloved."

We found this explanation of the biblical idea of friendship very powerful, especially in connection with the theme of this issue, hospitality.



In Paul's time and place, society was generally understood to operate in a divinely given hierarchy, with the emperor or other ruler at the top, followed by a small number of wealthy, well-educated families who produced the generals and political leaders. Each city had its own multi-level hierarchy; all cities were subordinate to the imperial city, Rome. Each person knew who was in a superior position to himself or herself

and who was inferior. Duty was owed to superiors and it was owed by inferiors.

Patronage was a common arrangement in which the head of an important family was the patron of a number of client families. The patron would help his clients with loans, connections for marriages or work opportunities, and the like. The clients owed their patron loyalty and sometimes work or goods. If you've ever seen the movie "The Godfather" or any of its sequels, you have a good idea of how patronage worked. The word *patron*, by the way, comes from the Latin word for "father." The patron stood in a paternal relationship with his clients: That is, he could command loyalty and obedience. The Roman emperor was known as the "father of his country."

This kind of social arrangement was generally true not just of individuals, but also of families. One's identity and place in the world were first established by one's family of birth. While upward mobility was not impossible, it was uncommon. Marriages were arranged for making good real estate acquisitions, ending disagreements, gaining a dowry, or cementing some social relationship for a family. Marriages were not primarily about love or companionship, as we now think of them.

And so we see that in this culture, many relationships were



given by birth or by arrangement, and almost all relationships had an underpinning of duty. But this does not mean that the people in such relationships did not love one another or care deeply about one another; it simply means that such relationships were not *primarily* about emotional attachment.

Friendship was one of the few relationships that could be chosen and that was understood to be between equals. True friends had to be equals so that they could be perfectly free with one another. If one stood to benefit from the other, that one would always be tempted to flattery or manipulation of the more powerful friend. The highest good of friendship was freedom

to be honest for the other person's wellbeing. Friends, it was believed, cared more about each other than about themselves. They had "one soul" or "one heart." Their conversation was for mutual up-building and they could always trust each other for that. True friends never let each other be in need. (These true friendships were understood to exist only between men, however.)

You can see elements of this ancient idea about friendship appearing in the New Testament depictions of early Christian communities, with some important differences. For non-Christians in this ancient Roman world, friendship was so demanding that one could not have too many friends, for it would be

impossible to be a real friend to all of them. It was almost impossible to be friends across class barriers. Women were not expected to be able to care deeply about mutual edification. But among Christians, members of the community were expected to treat one another as friends no matter how many and how varied they were.

Women and men, rich and poor, slave and free were all drawn into friendship with one another because God had befriended them. This was a radical change in the understanding of human life together. 🌿

**The Rev. Sarah Henrich** is professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn.



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“ My relationships with women brighten my life every day. My grandma is an excellent example. She’s an incredible role model, and her kind spirit shines through. She showed me what is essential in my life. ”

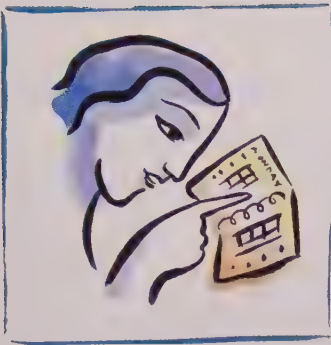
—Tiffany, Youth Gathering participant

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## CALENDAR NOTES

# April

compiled by Audrey Novak Riley  
from sources including the Lutheran  
Study Bible, Evangelical Lutheran  
Worship, and Sundays and Seasons,  
published by Augsburg Fortress,  
Publishers ([www.augsburgfortress.org](http://www.augsburgfortress.org)).

This month begins with the heart of the church's year, the Three Days (sometimes called the *Triduum*), when we go deeper into all that God has done to save us. April continues into the white season of Easter, 50 days of rejoicing with the risen Christ.

### 1 Maundy Thursday

Lent ends late this afternoon, and the evening service of Maundy Thursday brings us face to face with a new commandment: to love one another as Christ has loved us. We symbolically carry out that commandment with the washing of feet in church tonight. How do we carry it out in our daily lives? The texts for tonight are Exodus 12:1-4 [5-10] 11-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35.

### 2 Good Friday

Last night we were commanded to love one another as Christ has loved us, and tonight we are brought face to face with exactly how much Christ loves us: even to death, death on a cross. Tonight's texts are Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9; John 18:1-19:42.

### 3 Resurrection of Our Lord

#### Vigil of Easter

Tonight's liturgy is a feast of word and sacrament! We come together in the light of the new fire and the Paschal candle to listen to the history of God's great work of creation and salvation, and then we take up our share of that work with

the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia! In Wittenberg, where Martin Luther lived so long ago, the people of the Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches of the town come together at the Easter Vigil to light each other's candles in the town square. Whose candle will you light tonight? The texts appointed for this joyous night are Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Psalm 136:1-9, 23-26; Genesis 7:1-5, 11-18, 8:6-18, 9:8-13; Psalm 46; Genesis 22:1-18; Psalm 16; Exodus 14:10-31, 15:20-21; Exodus 15:1b-13, 17-18; Isaiah 55:1-11; Isaiah 12:2-6; Proverbs 8:1-8, 19-21, 9:4b-6 or Baruch 3:9-15, 32-4:4; Psalm 19; Ezekiel 36:24-28; Psalms 42 and 43; Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 143; Zephaniah 3:14-20; Psalm 98; Jonah 1:1-2:1; Jonah 2:2-3 [4-6] 7-9; Isaiah 61:1-4, 9-11; Deuteronomy 32:1-4, 7, 36a, 43a; Daniel 3:1-29; Song of the Three 35-65; Romans 6:3-11; John 20:1-18.

### 4 Resurrection of Our Lord Easter Day

Does your congregation welcome lots of visitors on Easter morning? Mine does. And from my comfortable perch up in the choir loft, I look down each Easter at all the neighbors and visitors mashed together as tight as the ushers can squeeze them into the pews and hope the pastor will preach fast. (Don't tell him I said that!) Let's all welcome each one of our visitors as Christ would want us to: warmly, joyfully, mercifully. The texts appointed for today are Acts 10:34-43



Isaiah 65:17–25; Psalm 118:1–2, 4–24; 1 Corinthians 15:19–26 or Acts 10:34–43; Luke 24:1–12 or John 20:1–18.

### Easter Evening

What a fascinating story this evening's Gospel tells. Can you imagine how discouraged and confused the pair trudging down the road away from Jerusalem were? They tell the stranger the saddest words known to humanity: "But we had hoped." But what a surprise awaited them in the breaking of the bread! The texts appointed for this evening are Isaiah 25:6–9; Psalm 114; 1 Corinthians 5:6b–8; Luke 24:13–49.

### Easter Monday

In the late fourth century, a believer named Egeria wrote back to her sisters in Spain (or maybe southern France) about how the Christians in Jerusalem observed the days and weeks after Easter Sunday. The people baptized at the Easter Vigil had spent Lent gathering with their bishop in preparation for the sacrament; now they gathered with their bishop to reflect on and live deeper into the sacrament. Even though we may have been baptized as infants, we can still benefit from their example. What does baptism mean to you? What does your own baptism mean to you? These texts may be used on any day during the week after Easter Day: Daniel 12:1–3;

Psalm 16:8–11; Acts 2:14, 22b–32; Matthew 28:9–15a.

### 11 Second Sunday of Easter

Every three years, we read from the book of Revelation during the Easter season. This mysterious text is filled with strange visions, but its message is one of joyful hope. The writer seeks to comfort a deeply divided community suffering under persecution; scholars have detected many coded references to the brutal ruler Nero in the text. Today's passage reminds its first readers that no matter what the Emperor says or does, the real "ruler of the kings of the earth" loves us, freed us from our sins, and made us to be a holy kingdom. How is this a comfort and a challenge to us today? The readings are Acts 5:27–32; Psalm 118:14–29 or Psalm 150; Revelation 1:4–8; John 20:19–31.

### 18 Third Sunday of Easter

Today's passage from Revelation gives us a glimpse of worship in heaven: thousands and thousands of heavenly beings and earthly beings all singing together, with blessing and honor and glory and might to the Lamb. Have you ever heard a really good chorus and orchestra singing the "Worthy Is the Lamb" and "Amen" grand finale of Handel's *Messiah*? Glorious as that may be, it's only the palest hint of what the writer of Revelation was envi-

sioning. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia! The Scripture texts for today are Acts 9:1–6 [7–20]; Psalm 30; Revelation 5:11–14; John 21:1–19.

### 25 Fourth Sunday of Easter

Today's passage from Revelation tells us more about what goes on in heaven: worship of God in the presence of God. What does that tell us about the importance of our worship of God here on earth? The texts appointed for today are Acts 9:36–43; Psalm 23; Revelation 7:9–17; John 10:22–30.

### 26 Mark, Evangelist

(transferred from April 25)

The Gospel that bears Mark's name is the oldest of the four Gospels. It was written in about the year 70, possibly in Rome, to a community of believers outside Jerusalem (which was destroyed by occupying Roman forces about that time). The evangelist was the first to gather up stories about Jesus that had been circulating orally for more than a generation and arrange them into one narrative. The purpose of the work was to strengthen the faith of its first readers, who were surely wondering why God would allow such troubles to befall Christ's faithful followers, who were still waiting for his promised return. The texts appointed for Mark's day are Isaiah 52:7–10; Psalm 57; 2 Timothy 4:6–11, 18; Mark 1:1–15.



# GOD'S HOLY NAME

By Elva K. Selvang

When Christians pray “hallowed be thy name,” in the Lord’s Prayer, we are asking for something. The words sound like a statement, but the holiness of God isn’t in question. Instead, Jesus has instructed his followers to be concerned for the holiness of God’s name in the world.

God’s name is frequently heard—in school hallways, in cars and buses stuck in traffic, in backyards and workshops, in houses and apartments, in sports arenas and on the streets. God’s name is often used to express joy, anger, frustration and surprise; to condemn, humiliate, and shock; and to fill up verbal space. Much of the time, such expressions lack reverence for God and any acknowledgement of God’s holiness. It’s appropriate to pray that God’s name might be protected from such profane use.

But the profaning of God’s name isn’t limited to unguarded speech. To profane God’s name is to act in ways that lead others to question God’s holy purposes. This understanding of profanity is captured well in the refrain of a song by Holly Near (“I Ain’t Afraid,” Edge, 2000):

**I ain’t afraid of your Yahweh,  
I ain’t afraid of your Allah,  
I ain’t afraid of your Jesus.  
I’m afraid of what you do in the  
name of your God.**

## THE HOLINESS OF GOD’S NAME

These days we repeatedly hear the message that we should fear what *others* will do in the name of their God. But when we pray “hallowed be thy name,” we confess that we, too, may profane our God’s name. We admit there are ways we harm others by what we do in the name of God. We also see that we fail others by what we don’t do, bringing shame on God’s name.

Frankly, it would be simpler if Jesus had taught us to pray “hallowed *is* thy name.” There could

be no argument, no consequences, and no personal exposure. But to pray “hallowed *be* thy name” is to ask for change and to request that God make use of us in that change. In this petition we aren’t at peace with ourselves or the world: We want something different.

The holiness of God’s name is a focus of divine concern in Ezekiel. God announces to the Israelites: “I will sanctify my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them . . .”(36:23a). The Israelites are in exile, a situation interpreted as punishment for their failure to live in righteousness.

But what God points to in this passage as bringing dishonor to God’s name is the perception of God among other nations. They see the Israelites in exile and think to themselves, “These are the people of the LORD, and yet they had to go out of his land” (Ezekiel 36:20). They think God has abandoned God’s people.

God refuses to tolerate injustice and abuse. God wants something different. Yet in Ezekiel we learn that the holiness of God’s name isn’t preserved by rejection and punishment, but through mercy and reconciliation. The profaning of God’s name will end when God acts with mercy and gives a new future to the very ones who did wrong in God’s name: “I will...



rather you from all the countries  
and bring you into your own land”  
(Ezekiel 36:24). The holiness of  
God’s name becomes visible in the  
undeserved gifts of deliverance,  
healing, and new life.

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Six years ago I stood on a street  
corner in Cape Town, South Africa.  
To my left was the mother church  
of the Dutch Reformed Church in  
South Africa and one block down  
the street was the Anglican cathed-  
ral. A decade earlier, the Dutch  
Reformed Church preached racial  
segregation. This segregation (apar-  
theid) was the law of the land. At the  
Anglican cathedral, the archbishop  
was Desmond Tutu, a Black South  
African who preached the equality  
of all and protested the law. Legally  
he wasn’t allowed to vote and he  
was expected to apply for permis-  
sion to live in the archbishop’s  
residence (which was in a “Whites-  
only” neighborhood). I went to  
South Africa knowing something of  
the fear and violence perpetrated in  
the name of God and wanting to see  
whether that profanity could give  
way to hope and reconciliation.

I walked the streets of Cape  
Town and spoke with seminary  
professors, students, and church  
members. At the end of one con-  
versation one person gently asked,  
“My sister, why does our situation  
matter so much to you?”

When we say “*Padre Nuestro*,” “*Baba Yetu*” or  
“Our Father,” we recognize our connectedness as  
sisters and brothers. And when we pray  
“hallowed be thy name,” we ask to be connected  
to God’s holy work of healing, justice, and  
reconciliation *throughout* the world.

The words of his question con-  
tain the heart of my answer. When  
we say “*Padre Nuestro*,” “*Baba Yetu*”  
or “Our Father,” we recognize our  
connectedness as *sisters* and *brothers*.  
And when we pray “hallowed be  
thy name,” we ask to be connected  
to God’s holy work of healing, jus-  
tice, and reconciliation *throughout*  
the world.

When we pray “hallowed be  
thy name,” there is no room for self-  
righteousness. God’s holiness shines  
a spotlight that exposes our profan-  
ing of God’s name. It reveals the  
ways our words and our actions—  
and failure to act—misrepresent  
God’s holy purposes.


We must reject fear and viola-  
tion perpetrated in God’s name,  
but that can’t be our end goal. To  
hallow God’s name we must give  
ourselves to God’s work of healing,  
reconciliation, and restoration.

## THE PRACTICE OF GRACE

For decades, many nations regard-  
ed South Africa and its mainline  
churches as a disgrace, cutting off  
connections in an attempt to bring  
judgment against the apartheid

regime and pressure to change. A  
miracle happened 16 years ago as  
those legal barriers fell and a demo-  
cratic republic was born. But we  
perpetuate the profaning of God’s  
name if we find comfort in acts of  
rejection and punishment.

South Africa deserves our atten-  
tion—not as a reminder of their time  
of disgrace, but to embolden us all  
in the practice of grace. Just as God  
promised the ancient Israelites in  
Ezekiel, we should expect the holi-  
ness of God’s name to be revealed  
through deeds of mercy, restora-  
tion, and new life.

To pray “hallowed be thy name”  
is to desire a world in which no one  
needs to question God’s holy pur-  
poses, whether they live in South  
Africa, South Hampton, South Car-  
olina, or South Los Angeles. It’s to  
offer others hope and healing, not  
fear, in the name of our God. To  
pray “hallowed be thy name” is to  
implore God to change us and to  
guide us in practicing grace and  
reconciliation in the world. 

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HEALTH WISE

## Tummy Trouble

by Molly M. Ginty

### Rumble. Gurgle. Burble.

Ouch! As Becky Sun sped through light traffic after a heavy meal, she felt stabbing pain in her stomach and knew she would have to dash to the bathroom very soon.

More than two decades later, Sun's bouts of diarrhea continue, plaguing her dozens of times each day since the first night she developed irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

"Like many IBS patients, I suffer symptoms that affect my everyday life," says Sun, 54, a stay-at-home mother in Redmond, Wash. "The moment I walk into a new place, the first thing I do is learn where the restroom is."

An estimated 15 percent of Americans are affected by IBS, a chronic condition that triggers abdominal pain, bloating, cramping and gas along with diarrhea and/or constipation.

During April, which is IBS Awareness Month, health advocates are alerting the public that this problem is three times more common in women than in men—but that it can be relieved by prescription drugs, dietary changes, and a host of other remedies.

IBS begins in the large intestine (colon), which is lined with muscles that contract and relax as they move food through the intestinal tract. In IBS patients, problems with the nervous system and/or the colon make these contractions abnormally strong and long-lasting, causing cramping and diarrhea; or abnormally weak and slow, causing constipation.

Health advocates say the most frustrating aspect of IBS may not be its physical pain, but the emotional angst it creates.

"People don't normally tend to talk about diarrhea or constipation," says Jeffrey D. Roberts, president of the IBS Self Help and Support Group. "Some patients have difficulty even broaching the topic with their spouses. They feel very alone because they can't attend family and social functions, and they get very worried because they are three times more likely than others to take sick days and may have trouble holding down jobs."

According to Dr. Lucinda Harris, an advisory board member for the International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD) and an assistant professor at the Mayo Clinic School of Medicine, diagnosing IBS takes an average three to five years. This occurs because half of patients are too embarrassed to seek medical help, and those who do may be brushed off by doctors who assume their tummy trouble is just temporary.

"I didn't get treatment for two years because my doctor kept telling me the problem was all in my head," says Becky Sun. "Then I finally talked to my mother about it, and she told me my father and my brother suffered secretly from IBS which runs in families."

If your doctor does diagnose you with IBS (defined as gastrointestinal upset lasting 12 weeks or more), what can you do to soothe your stomachache?

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This ongoing column is part of the Women of the ELCA health initiative, Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls. Visit [www.womenoftheelca.org](http://www.womenoftheelca.org) for more information.



For moderate to severe cases, prescription drugs include:

- alosetron (generic) or Lotronex (brand) for diarrhea);
- lubiprostone (generic) or Amitiza (brand) for constipation;
- anticholinergics (drugs that help normalize the nervous system); and
- low doses of antidepressants (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors or SSRIs for constipation and tricyclics for diarrhea).

Whether IBS is severe or mild, probiotics may also help. These “good” bacteria are found naturally in the gut, where they help the body fight off infections and absorb nutrients. Probiotics for IBS include *bifidobacterium infantis* to alleviate constipation, diarrhea, and pain, and *bifido lactobacillus* to reduce inflammation.

Other remedies include:

- avoiding foods that can trigger IBS (alcohol, carbonated beverages, artificial sweeteners, chocolate, dairy products, cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower);
- eating at regular times (which can help normalize bowel function);
- taking peppermint oil tablets (which can relieve pain and bowel spasms);
- getting regular exercise (which stimulates normal contractions in the intestine);
- taking fiber supplements such as psyllium (Metamucil) for constipation; and
- taking over-the-counter medications such as loperamide (Imodium) for diarrhea.

Though stress doesn’t technically cause IBS, family arguments, work deadlines,

and other challenges can aggravate its symptoms. Biofeedback, deep breathing, hypnosis, meditation, massage, progressive relaxation exercises, and yoga can all help—as can joining an IBS support group and relieving your stress by talking to other patients.

If you have IBS, health advocates say it’s best to look on the positive side. Unlike more serious gastrointestinal disorders such as ulcerative colitis and Crohn’s disease, IBS doesn’t cause permanent damage to the bowel tissue or boost your risk of colorectal cancer.

Each year, 10 percent of IBS patients report an improvement in their symptoms. Promising new drugs for IBS-related constipation and diarrhea could be on the market as early as next year. Researchers are developing a blood test that is 90 percent effective at detecting this chronic condition. Health advocates say its arrival will help IBS patients get diagnosed early—and help them get the treatment they need. 🌿

**Molly Ginty** lives in New York. Her work has appeared in *Women’s eNews*, *Marie Claire*, *Redbook*, and *Ms*.



**For more information:**  
International Foundation for Functional  
Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD)  
[www.iffgd.org](http://www.iffgd.org)





# One *Relationship* at a time

By Diane Dardón

the greatest challenges and responsibilities of her young life. But, she did not face them alone. Her campus ministry community rallied behind her as did another faith community she had connected to: Women of the ELCA.

A year before her father died, the women of the Northern Illinois Synod (NIS) focused on a mission of outreach and hospitality to young women on the Northern Illinois University campus. They invited Megan and other young women from Lutheran campus ministry to be guests at the Women of the ELCA synodical convention. The students—who attended the convention with all costs covered by the NIS Women of the ELCA—were delighted by the acceptance and support showered upon them by women who could have been their mothers, aunts, grandmothers. The NIS women rejoiced over the energy and enthusiasm the young women shared in worship, workshops, and small-group conversations. As they connected, both groups of women—younger and older—were blessed by each other.

Megan's father had been very ill so she was relieved when he finally turned a corner toward recovery. But then, in the midst of new hope, Megan, a college student, received a phone call: her father had died.

"He was supposed to be fine!" she cried in sorrow and shock.

Megan's mother and sister, in their own grief, turned to Megan for guidance and decision-making, and Megan found herself facing

## Network of support

Megan looked forward to reconnecting with her sisters in the faith as she made her way to an NIS Women of the ELCA retreat (again, as a guest). Only miles from the retreat center, she received



news of her father's death. The women from Northern Illinois who had gathered for the retreat were devastated when they learned of Megan's news. Quickly, they filled cards with loving words of encouragement and sent gifts. And most importantly, hundreds of women—those who knew Megan personally and those connected only through prayer chains—lifted up her and her family in prayer.

In her deepest time of need, Megan received the support of women across an entire synod and beyond. This young woman, who had never before experienced a death in her family, was held in the hearts and prayers of those who knew grief well. The burdens of one young woman were shared by a multitude of others. And this happened because the NIS Women of the ELCA reached out and welcomed in. No one knew the impact this mission of hospitality would have on one hurting young woman—and many others.

Today, young women on the Northern Illinois University campus look forward to annual Women

of the ELCA events and are happy to help out with worship and workshops. The NIS Women of the ELCA provide copies of *Lutheran Woman Today*, and information about *Café* to the young women on campus, connecting them to the larger church.

And women from both groups have come into deeper relationship with each other through an intentional program of support as they send each other cards, letters, e-mail and Facebook messages. They remember birthdays, holidays, and special events in each others' lives. The two diverse groups of women share relationship.

### **Building relationships**

Online dictionaries describe relationship as the connection between two or more people and their involvement with each other. The definition never mentions common interests or similarities. It doesn't matter if the people in a relationship grew up in post-World War II days or post-modern days. It doesn't matter if those in a relationship come from a rural area or an urban setting. It doesn't matter if a relationship involves people who are children or people who have children.

What matters the most in building a relationship is that people—sisters in the church—genuinely connect and become involved in each other's lives.

A young woman who recently graduated from college was asked how Women of the ELCA could best engage her in the work and mission of the organization. She responded, "I want genuine, authentic relationship." Another young woman replied, "I just want to connect." The mission of outreach and hospitality toward young women and girls is about connecting in genuine and authentic ways.

Yet, many women—older and younger—become anxious about connecting with someone outside their peer group. Building relationships with people of varying ages can be daunting, given the chasm of interests and lifestyles among the generations. Despite the differences among the sisterhood, the mission of hospitality toward young women is one that can be accomplished by building one relationship at a time.

### **The power of invitation**

Alisha was always friendly and courteous at church but she rarely engaged in the work or life of women there. She did not feel welcomed into the circles of established friends, and she felt as if she had nothing in common with the women whose hands she shook every Sunday when she passed the peace. But that changed when the feeble hands of an older woman waved to Alisha one day.

Alisha was passing the house

*A "mutual mission" of younger and older women and girls in the church today involves building relationships. It's a mission that needs invitation and acceptance.*



of an older member of her congregation. The woman called out, welcomed Alisha to her porch, and offered her cookies and conversation. This happened several times and the two women became friends. They began working together in the older woman's garden. The fruits of their labors were shared with others in the congregation and community.

The relationship between Alisha and her dear sister came because of an invitation. An important part of the invitation is that there were no strings attached. Alisha was not asked to join a Bible study or to help out with a project of the Women of the ELCA. She was invited (like the women from Northern Illinois University) to simply come and be in the company of one another. What grew out of the invitation Alisha received was a relationship of mutual support and caring.

Two women with different lifestyles, circumstances, and ages sat together, listened to each other, learned to respect and love each other. They offered what they could in service. They connected and became involved in each other's lives and in the mission of the church.

### **Mutual mission**

Building such relationships is the key to involving young women and girls in all facets of Women of the ELCA. When asked what needed to happen

in her church for her to get involved in the women's Bible studies and circle meetings, a young woman answered without hesitation: "I need to know the people first!"

She continued, "For me, studying the Bible and sharing my thoughts about the Bible is very personal. I don't want to sit down with a bunch of people I don't know. I need to know that I won't be judged for what I say. I need to know the people I'm with really respect and like me. I need to know who I'm with before I entrust my deepest, spiritual thoughts with them."

In other words, the work of the heart and soul can best be done when those gathered together are connected.

After developing authentic connections with young women and girls, it is important to maintain those relationships by getting involved together in mission. Young women speak of the importance of working with one another in the world. One said: "If I'm going to be involved with anyone or any group, I need to know that we have a mutual mission." Working together in "mutual mission" is an effective way in which women of all generations get involved in the world—and become involved in each other's lives.

As Theresa and Nicki rolled their paintbrushes, coloring a wall that was once dull and dirty, they talked to each other about life.

That one was old enough to be the other's grandmother was of no consequence. The two were involved in a "mutual mission." Together, they poured out paint and their secrets. During their shared involvement in helping others, they connected. Years later, the two women maintain a loving relationship as they continue to seek ways to live in mission for the world.

### **To make a difference**

"I want to be a part of something that has meaning in life. I want to make a difference in the world," declared a young woman in seminary. Her words were echoed by her mother who said, "Women need to know they have something important to offer each other and the community."

A "mutual mission" of younger and older women and girls in the church today involves building relationships. It's a mission that needs invitation and acceptance. It is a mission that thrives through genuine caring. It is a mission that is sustained through involvement with one another and in the world. It is a mission that places relationship building at the heart of outreach and hospitality. 🌿

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LET US PRAY

## These Many Tables

by Julie K. Ageson

*Welcome one another,  
just as Christ has welcomed  
you.* ROMANS 15:7

To some degree, it's about a life-long love affair with food. On another level, it's about symbols and rituals that continue to nourish and sustain. But perhaps even more significantly, it's about our common longing to be welcomed, fed and nourished by a generous God. Yes, I love tables.

It isn't just the beauty of a well-tended table, set with cloth and candle, flower and fruit. Neither is it only the creative satisfaction and culinary delight over preparing beautiful food to grace the table. Nor is it entirely the rich collection of memories shaped and shared around the many tables of our lives. It's all these things and so much more. Yes, I love tables.

Our first table was a wedding gift. To that table, we brought memories of life together around earlier tables in our lives—farm tables laden with food at harvest time; an old picnic table where we cracked crab and feasted on fish on the island where I grew up; kitchen tables, coffee tables, communion tables.

Around these many tables, we heard the family stories and relived family memories. Sometimes there were heated debates and arguments. Always there were prayers of thanks and acknowledgement that the food, the bonds of belonging, and the rituals were gifts from a gracious God. We knew the table to be sacred space. We knew that food and drink were not only for us but to be shared and celebrated with friends, with strangers, with outsiders, and most of all with those who were hungry. Along the

way, we learned that *we* were to be food and drink for one another.

Food and feasting are major biblical themes and the table is about holy hospitality. It's a welcoming place, a threshold inviting us to be part of something larger than ourselves. In the tents of our Old Testament ancestors, guests at the table were safe from the attack of enemies—"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows." Hospitality meant being welcomed and protected by a loving God.

God spreads a banquet at the many tables of our lives. God invites us to welcome one another, to be God's hands, to be little Christs, to bear one another's burdens. In our common longing for meaning and for leading lives that matter, the face of God is revealed to us in that holy meal each Sunday where no one is excluded and all are fed and welcomed.

The tables of our lives come in all shapes and sizes and they convey so much more than good food, important conversations, and places to gather. God is here! God meets us at these sacred tables—inviting us to be food and drink for one another, to welcome the stranger and feed the hungry, to be part of the Body of Christ. Holy hospitality is God's gift, the welcoming table we're all invited to share. Taste and see the goodness of God! 🌿

**Julie K. Ageson** is coordinator of ELCA Resource Centers and director of the Resource Center for the Eastern North Dakota Synod. She is a member of Bethesda Lutheran Church in Moorhead, Minn.





by Marguerite M. Rourke

**B**elievers are a Welcoming People. Rooted in our Hebrew heritage, we have welcomed even as we lived through bondage, exile, restoration, and kingdom times. We welcomed throughout the murky intertestamental years, we welcomed during the early days of a fragile new faith community, on through the apostolic years, across centuries of present threat and imminent danger, and even unto these very days and hours of the Church Militant. From of old, as Jews and then as Christians, we have been absolutely certain that we are to welcome. The command

to do so is clear and unequivocal.

Our commitment to hospitality is traditionally traced to Abraham, as in Genesis 18:1-15 he welcomed the three angelic visitors who would change his life forever. God really set the precedent for hospitality, welcoming our first parents into the beautiful garden and providing for their every need. On a personal note, I think Noah is pretty much the human prototype for offering hospitality: He did as he was commanded, welcoming all manner of weird passengers onto that ark. (Have you noticed that there isn't so much as a peep in the Good Book about God or Mr. Noah con-

sulting Mrs. Noah? Well, just a little food for hospitality thought.)

That we are biblically bound to extend hospitality is certain. The commandment runs like a red thread throughout the tapestry of the Hebrew Scriptures. Just one example is Leviticus 19:34 "the stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you and you shall love him as yourself for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God."

#### THE STRANGER

We are still very certain that we are to welcome, but in these latter days what is not so certain is *how* we wel-





ome. Does your congregation practice hospitality? Do the faithful welcome the stranger? Do you welcome each other and offer hospitality within the community? Is your welcome open and obvious? Is it intentional, warm, genuine and glad? These are not trick questions, but they address tricky practice. In Matthew 25:35 Jesus says, "I was a stranger, and you welcomed me." How do we welcome the stranger?

The newly baptized may well be close to true strangers as we get in the church. Of course we welcome visitors, "strangers" of varying sorts in our midst. Not tricky: Greet warmly, guide through bulletin and

liturgy maze, invite and accompany to the fellowship coffee hour, get all information needed for the requisite "Thank you for worshiping with us" note to be sent with dispatch, and you're done. Very tidy.

On the day after Thanksgiving, I had the joy and privilege of baptizing our first grandchild, a beautiful baby boy. The instant I took him in my arms to join him to his Lord and Savior's death and resurrection, I was suddenly overcome by a great truth: Welcoming the newly baptized as stranger is very untidy. They come with strings attached. They are ours, they belong to us and to our congregation, and they

change our church life forever. We don't get to vote on who does or doesn't get to be baptized. These particular strangers are thrust upon us, rather like the Christmas gift that you have to keep because your grandma or auntie will want to see you wearing or using it. Welcoming the newly baptized infant, child, youth or adult is never an act: It is a process that is life-long and life-deep.

Who is more of a stranger among us than a baby? We have no idea how that infant will turn out.

Welcoming the newly baptized older child or adult is equally daunting. How do we help this stranger become an unstranger?



## THE FAMILY

Fear not, beloved! Jesus has the answer. Everyone is family. Jesus told us that when we treat anyone with love and care, we are doing it to him, and his directions are not complicated: feed, clothe, give drink, welcome, visit, tend, comfort. Everybody.

This is a good place to address our responsibility for welcoming and for extending hospitality. Aren't we obligated to welcome and to show hospitality? Absolutely. Extending hospitality was a life and death matter in the Middle East long before Jesus' time, and it remains so to this day. But even though in our country today hospitality is not always a matter of life and death (though it certainly can be), we still must have a clear understanding of hospitality.

We may not consider welcoming as merely fulfilling an obligation. The Holy One is truly grieved when we think of hospitality as one more "thou shalt," or when we delude ourselves into thinking that offering hospitality is somehow our gracious choice.

Our instructions are clear: We are to live the Hebrew—and now the Christian—ethos of welcoming as extending hospitality equally to all because Jesus did.

## THE RISK

By its very nature, hospitality has risk; when we stand on the steps of

the church and open wide our congregational and individual arms, we don't know much of anything about those we are welcoming. Will our faith family be blessed by them, or will they sow seeds of discontent and dissension within the body? We don't know, but we must risk those things. Will those welcomed strangers bring joy and offer glad service, or will they end up C & Es (Christmas and Easter worshipers) who show up only when poinsettias or lilies decorate the church? We don't know, but we must take that risk anyway.

Perhaps most disheartening for us is the risk of being rejected by the newly welcomed, a scary and unpleasant prospect.

The reality for us is that the stranger is not ours to judge or screen or profile. The stranger is ours to welcome, to receive with hospitality, to assimilate into the family of discipleship, and to nurture with prayer, acceptance, and encouragement.

Let us be encouraged by our Lord's promise to us in Mark 9:37 that "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

## THE NEWLY BAPTIZED

Welcoming even the newly baptized, perhaps especially the newly baptized, is a risk. Welcoming and

offering hospitality is risky because we open ourselves to some unsavory possibilities.

Will the person be an asset to our community who wants to live among God's faithful people and be an active part of us? Will she worship, learn and serve with God's people? Will she strengthen our community for servant discipleship in Jesus' name? Will he want "to grow in faith, love, and obedience to the will of God"?

Will she want to use those power gifts of the Spirit that were poured into her at her baptism to "learn to trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace"? (Holy Baptism, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 228) Will they gladly support the Body of Christ with their time, their abilities, and their treasure?

We do not know, nor can we know, for that is God's business. What we do know is that the God who loved and made those newly baptized strangers will tend them with the same mercy and goodness that surrounds and supports us all. What we do know is that as a congregation we have a grace-full role in helping these newly baptized strangers learn to live "in the covenant of their Baptism and in communion with the church," so that "they may lead a godly life until the



lay of Jesus Christ" (Holy Baptism, *Lutheran Book of Worship*, p. 121).

## THE HOPE

Hospitality also has a dimension of hope, thanks be to God! At one time, we were all strangers—newly baptized, newly relocated, newly exiled from some place or other, or just newly *whatever* that rendered us aliens in the land. Our stranger-ness is a marvelous arena for hope, that joyful anticipation of God's intentions working out in and through our lives. God's hopes are God's own holy dreams for us.

What better place for our hope to be planted, nourished, grown and fulfilled than in the newly baptized? At a baptism, we are privileged to be present at the very beginning of a Christian's formation in faith and discipleship, called by Jesus Christ to life of holy discovery. We are privileged to walk alongside that child or adult as they hear God's call to servanthood in Jesus' name. We get to hold that child's hand and lead him to know this congregational family. We get to teach her how to pray by herself and with God's people. We get to watch her grow and flourish in her Savior's love. We are entrusted with guiding that adult as she learns what it means to be God's unique and beloved child.

Welcoming the newly baptized in this way we will never "neglect to

show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2). It is our privilege to walk the Emmaus road with the newly baptized as they first experience their hearts burning within them when hearing the Word and claiming the wonderful Gospel of our salvation for themselves. What an occasion of grace!

To welcome the newly baptized is to become companions in the Lord, sisters and brothers in Christ, as we take to heart Jesus' blessed assurance: "I have called you friends" (John 15:15).

## THE CHURCH

There are hundreds of perfectly fine programs and publications about how to welcome the newly baptized into congregations, extend hospitality to strangers, and assimilate them into the worship, learning, and service life of the parish. Holy Mother Church does not need one more article about how to do this.

What we do need, however, is to be church, that is, to live as the *ekklesia*, the called out people of God in Christ Jesus who embrace strangers in general and the newly baptized in particular not as probationary family members (can there be any such thing?), but as fully integrated, completely hugged-into-siblings in our *ekklesia* family.

In Romans 15:7, St. Paul bids us

"Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."

By grace we are God's people. In the waters of baptism each of us is scrubbed clean from sin's stain, imprinted permanently with the cross of Christ, sealed by the Holy Spirit, chocked full of the Spirit's gifts, and sent out to be a welcomer, a hospitaler, an embracer of all God's children, one at a time.

We are all these things for all our lives—and nobody can downsize us from Jesus' corporation or take away the job he has given us to do in his name.

We get to be the Welcoming People all the time! Even as we are renewed, restored, and resurrected each day in our baptism, we get to bring other people to the same place. So then, dear friends in the Lord, let us risk everything to say "Welcome" to all who come to Christ. Let us hope in the One who first had hope for us.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13). ☙

**The Rev. Dr. Marguerite M. Rourk**, pastor of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church in Fairfax, Va., shares her life with David, her husband of 40 years, sons Edwin of Portland, Ore., and Matthew of Asheville, N.C., new grandson, Tiernan, two cats and three ferrets. The ferrets are still in charge.

# *Opening our Hearts*

*by Nanette Sawyer*





We love our parents differently than we love our spouses or our children. We have affection for our acquaintances which feels different from the intimacy we share with our best friends. Nevertheless, these are all forms of love. Similarly, we are hospitable in different ways toward different people in our lives.

We often think of hospitality as a kindness we extend to people through social gatherings or physical spaces. We offer a meal; we throw a dinner party; or we invite someone to stay in our homes. Hospitality like this involves physical work, planning, and sometimes sacrifice, as we literally make room for others

outward forms of hospitality—toward those in prison and toward those who suffer or are tortured. What type of hospitality is this? And how can we extend it faithfully without becoming depleted?

The hospitality described in Hebrews suggests a spiritual hospitality. It comes from the understanding that God is with us always and will never forsake us. Spiritual hospitality, when practiced intentionally, can be deeply healing and transformative. “It is well for the heart to be strengthened by grace,” Hebrews says (Hebrews 13:9). A heart full of grace is a great source for spiritual hospitality.

*“Let mutual love continue.*

*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,  
for by doing that some have entertained  
angels without knowing it”*

*Hebrews 13:1–2*

and use some of our resources to care for them. It can flow from a place of love and generosity, or it can come from a sense of duty and responsibility.

The book of Hebrews reminds us to “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:1–2). The expressions of hospitality spoken of in Hebrews are

We could think of spiritual hospitality as the posture that our spirits take. Is your heart full to overflowing? Is your posture relaxed and open? Does your spirit smile warmly toward other souls when you encounter them, or do you feel shielded and self-protective?

*Welcoming God First*

Spiritual hospitality begins with our welcoming the God of Love to

nourish us. This is hospitality to God! God the Creator, who named us before we were born, who formed us in our mothers’ wombs, this God loves us deeply. Allowing ourselves to be truly aware of this love, turning towards it and receiving this grace, is the first step of hospitality. “We love because God first loved us” is the foundation of hospitality. You are precious and the image of God is imprinted on the core of your being. Hospitality to God allows you to welcome God’s love and be healed by it.

An important part of welcoming God’s love is being honest with yourself and with God about what you feel and think. Sometimes we act the way we think we should, but we don’t feel sincere in doing it. Or we say we believe that God loves us, but really we feel unlovable deep inside ourselves. You might try talking to God honestly about how you currently feel and what you want to feel.

Yes, this is hospitality! It is opening your heart to God the way you would open a door to a guest. Only opening up will allow true encounter. Meet God at the threshold of your heart where truth is spoken.

Spiritual practices can help develop this hospitality to God. For example, you can have a dialogue with God. Some people can hold inner conversations with God, and

others need to write them down, a practice called spiritual journaling.

Centering prayer is another spiritual practice. This involves getting quiet and still and making room inside yourselves to feel God's presence. A common way to practice this involves choosing a sacred word to focus on instead of letting your mind run with busy thoughts. The spiritual word can be anything. It can be as simple as *open* or *wait*, or it can be obviously spiritual, like *God* or *faith*.

To pray this way, get physically comfortable, then begin to repeat this word at a moderate pace. When other thoughts and feelings pop into your mind (and they will), notice that you got distracted and return to your word. Keep repeating it slowly. Over time, you will get better at slowing down your busy mind, and God will have more room to show up and sit with you. It is important that you learn to let go of trying to figure out things by yourself, and you make time and space to be with God.

Some people find it helpful to repeat a phrase over and over. For example, author and theologian Henri Nouwen once repeated "The Lord is my shepherd" in his prayer practice for two full years. He said, "If we keep saying the truth, the real truth—'The Lord is my Shepherd; there is nothing I shall want'—and let that truth descend from our

mind into our heart, gradually those words are written on the walls of our inner holy place. That becomes a space in which we can receive our colleagues and our work, our family and our friends, and the people whom we will meet during the day" (Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives*).

We can also extend hospitality to ourselves with this type of prayer. When God and our true self meet each other in our inner holy place, healing happens.

Practicing self-awareness, compassion, and nurture toward the self helps us to strengthen our inner resources so that we have more to give when we begin extending hospitality to others.

### *Invitation, Welcome and Nurture*

Spiritual practices always require discernment. We need to figure out how to strike a balance so that we don't overdo or underdo. Hospitality takes place in three different movements: in, with, and out—and we need a balance between the three. Welcoming God's love and compassion into our hearts through sacred dialogue and centering prayer are inward practices. They develop space inside us for God to live.

Once we have a foundation of hospitality between ourself and the God of Love, then we are in a

good position to offer hospitality to our family, friends, neighbors, strangers, and even our enemies.

The inward part of hospitality is what allows us to become receptive. Receptivity is about being open towards others and ourselves (including God), so that we can accurately perceive what is happening between us. Receptivity is an internal posture of openness that invites others into our lives. This is the basis of invitation.

You can usually tell when someone is really interested in meeting you. Their physical posture is open towards you and their facial expressions express interest. They turn toward you; they look at you; they smile; they give you the feeling that they want to use their time engaging with you. They are being receptive, and their external posture reflects an internal, spiritual, emotional posture.

We can develop this kind of receptive posture of invitation through spiritual practices of awareness, such as centering prayer. These practices help us become attentive, relaxed, and hopeful.

The second part of spiritual hospitality is what happens between us and others. When we are invitational, we will find that people respond to our openness and suddenly we are in position to welcome them. Maybe they have responded to an invitation to dinner,



maybe they have responded to a smile and we have entered into conversation. Deeply welcoming someone means giving them the gift of your full presence. It means paying attention, asking questions, noticing, and listening. Not only are you fully present, but you also encounter the intrinsic value in them. You see that they are also beloved children of God. When this happens, a kind of reverence rises up in us. We are truly with them, and that is the essence of welcome.

Receptivity and reverence toward others naturally lead to a desire in us to give. Generosity flows out of these types of encounters.

Practicing generosity is the third part of hospitality—the outward element. It is a posture of nurture through which we offer physical, spiritual, and emotional care and gratitude. Rather than depleting us, this kind of generosity renews and transforms us.

We experience a deeper sense of abundance when we realize that nurturing our relationships is more important than accumulating possessions. We realize that we already have more than we thought we had. Life becomes more abundant when we live through generosity and extravagant love.

Among these three elements of hospitality—in (invitation), with (welcome), out (nurture)—we want to strike a balance. Holding a recep-

tive, open posture but never welcoming and nurturing would be an incomplete expression of hospitality. It is in developing all three of these parts that hospitality becomes the most transformative.

## *Messy Hospitality*

It's easy to think of hospitality as a tidy affair. You may be tempted to understand hospitality as creating a beautiful environment into which you might receive people. I love dinner parties and beautiful place settings. Different cultures, families, and communities have a variety of specific expectations about the ways to express hospitality.

You may find that exploring a deeper, more spiritual, and more transformational kind of hospitality leads you to step outside community expectations to do things a little differently.

As a pastor, I hear many people reflect on a sense of isolation that they feel. Isolation is the opposite of hospitality. Oddly enough, I believe that *tidy hospitality* can sometimes increase this sense of isolation.

Tidy hospitality requires us to create an illusion of perfection and happiness. Real life is less tidy than that, and spiritual hospitality is grounded in real life. This makes spiritual hospitality a little risky because we will surely encounter emotions and situations which are a bit messy and even uncomfortable.

When we are part of communities that expect us to always put on a happy face and maintain appearances, it can be especially challenging to admit that we are feeling blue or to invite someone into our home when the dishes are piled up in the kitchen sink. Spiritual hospitality that is really transformative—and ultimately healing—will flow out of honesty about our lives.

When we are willing to show that we are not always in control, we actually free ourselves to be authentic. We let others know that we will not judge them for being equally honest. This kind of transparency, letting people see into the truth of our lives, can be counter-cultural in some of our communities. When you exhibit this kind of transparency, you are being a role model of hospitality because you are being generous with the truth of who you are.

Don't let that stop you from having beautiful dinner parties, though. Because they can be lots of fun and hospitality happens there, too! 🌿

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TO GOD'S BELOVED: PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS

## SESSION 8

# Holy Hospitality

by Sarah Henrich

### BIBLE STUDY

#### Theme Verse

ROMANS 15:7

"Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God the Father."

#### Opening

##### Hymn

"All Are Welcome," *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 641, verse 4, or "We Eat the Bread of Teaching," *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 518, verse 3

#### Prayer

Pray together the following Prayer for Grace to Hear the Word (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 72), or pray in your own words:

Blessed Lord God,  
you have caused the Holy Scripture to be written  
for the nourishment of your people.  
Grant that we may hear them, read, mark, learn,  
and inwardly digest them,  
that, comforted by your promises,  
we may embrace and forever hold fast to  
the hope of eternal life, which  
you have given us in Jesus Christ,  
our Savior and Lord.  
Amen.

#### Introduction

"A person can get a little . . . bored when a person's mom goes back to school," said the serious five-year-old at the screen door. How did this little boy become so wise and so insightful? Somehow he knew it would be better to point out a general truth rather than making his complaint too personal for Mom to hear.

Sometimes we all do better and are less defensive when we are allowed to overhear a general truth and then see if the shoe fits. Paul shows just this sort of wisdom in Romans 14 and 15. In these chapters, he writes important truths about our calling to be neighbors as Christ was neighbor to us. But he never names the people he is addressing. He uses only the distinctions "weak" and "strong." Like the five-year-old at the screen door, he invites his hearers, including us, to hear about a problem and decide how we might be part of the solution. Let's listen in.

#### God has welcomed them

Everything that Paul writes to the Romans in chapters 14 and 15 hinges on two unshakeable convictions.

The first one is: Paul and all believers belong to God in Christ Jesus. Sometimes he writes about this relationship as a family relationship, in which Gentiles are adopted into the family of God's people. Sometimes Paul describes us as one body with many different parts.

The second one is: Paul speaks of us as giving glory to our Lord—he sees himself and all believers as slaves of Christ. We owe Christ our loyalty and alle-



ance. Christ—not Caesar nor the local magistrate—is our Lord.

There is unity here as well as diversity. We are neighbors and family and subjects all at once. Our ties to one another are intimate. In these chapters, Paul wants to remind us that our ties to one another should be of the same shape and quality as the intimate connection between God's mercy, our Lord Christ Jesus, and ourselves.

Paul provides many different images to describe our human interconnections, and the image of *lordship* is the important one in Romans 14. God is in Christ who is our Lord. There are two reasons that lordship is such an important image for Paul.

First, Paul is convinced that “as the Lord is, so are his subjects.” If we are subjects or slaves of Christ, not only do we owe Christ obedience and allegiance, but our lives are to be shaped like his own life. We have already seen (Romans 12:1–4) how Paul counsels his hearers to assess themselves soberly, to exercise their practical reasoning (their minds) in the same way that Christ did. He is calling upon all believers to live like Christ because “Christ is the goal of the law” (10:4) and “we have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16). By living from Christ's perspective, we build up the body. We “present our members to God as instruments of righteousness” (6:13). We will see more about that kind of life this might be in this session.

Second, only one's lord has the right to judge, reward, and punish. That means that believers are not to judge one another. You might think Paul is a little idealistic about this command not to judge one another, but this missionary-evangelist has been around the block a few times. Paul does not suggest that we should simply accept injustice or harm. Believers must still see one another clearly in order to offer useful help. Believers might still agree to restrain one another from doing evil. But no one is to take the role of God in judging someone else as faithful or unfaith-

ful, worthy or unworthy of God's mercy. (See “Holy Hospitality,” p. 22.)

In Romans 14, Paul tells us that all believers are subject to their Lord who empowers them and exemplifies for them what life together is to look like. Their Lord, who gives faith and alone knows the human heart, is the only one to judge human worth. This very same Lord gave his all for them all, making them all worthy. Paul has some very clear ideas about how life is to be lived for this Lord, Jesus the Messiah of God.

## **Building Up Our Neighbor**

### **READ ROMANS 14:1–3.**

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. . . . for God has welcomed them.

### **READ ROMANS 15:1–7.**

We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. . . . For Christ did not please himself.

Paul has done something very wise and subtle in writing these verses. He directly addresses all his hearers, in 14:1 with the direct command, “welcome,” and in 15:1 with the more indirect word, “we who are strong ought to put up with.” In both verses he makes allies of his hearers. We who hear this letter stand with Paul as the strong. It is we who welcome those who are weak in faith.

Paul gives his hearers the best possible picture of themselves so that they will be on their best behavior. Now, recall that Paul has already said in 12:3 that we are all to be clear, or sober in our self-assessment, for God does not give to all the same measure of faith. And we have also heard from Paul that none of us can judge another person's faith. When Paul sets up all his hearers as strong in faith (including us!), we can do nothing but welcome one another without trying to judge who is weak. We are expected to welcome each

other as God has welcomed us in order to build each other up, as Christ also did.

The word *welcome* in 14:1 has a particular meaning that our English translations do not convey fully. It is such a key word in this section of Romans that it deserves a little more attention (14:1, 3; 15:7 twice). How do we know it's a key word? Note that it shows up in the verses that begin this section. It is, in fact, the first word that Paul uses to describe the behavior of life according to the Spirit. Not only are we to welcome one another, but we are to do this because God has already done it. Other believers are already God's children as much as we ourselves. How can we act otherwise?

The second use in 15:7 is in a major *therefore* verse. After writing about the community of believers as one in which each of us ought to please our neighbor in order to build up our neighbor (15:2), he summarizes all he has said in 15:7: "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."

Our welcome of each other echoes Christ's welcome of us, recalling Paul's conviction that while we were still sinners God sent his son to die for us (Romans 5:6, 10)—the ultimate welcome. When we welcome one another, it is for the very glory of God. Our behavior, our life together in Christ's body manifests God's glory—or not. The world sees the way we treat one another, how we engage one another for upbuilding, as the picture of God. It is God's glory when human beings live by the power of the Spirit. We are to imitate Christ in striving to build one another up not only for the other person's sake, but for God's sake. (See "Opening Our Hearts," p. 26.)

No wonder we need to exercise the power of discernment. Each of us is an individual, fully known only to God. Therefore this upbuilding requires exercising our God-given gifts of intelligence, compassion, foresight, commitment, and every other gift we can imagine. It is the exercise of all good gifts for the sake of building up the other that Paul calls *love* and *welcome*.

In the Greco-Roman world, the word *welcome* described how friends might receive each other. If you welcomed someone, it implied that you had their best interests at heart, that you were dedicated to mutual upbuilding. Such mutual upbuilding required a relationship where truth could be spoken and heard because both persons trusted each other. This model of friendship, of trust that we are on one another's side, is the model Paul chooses to express to the Romans what life in Christ ought be. It is an extraordinary model, for it requires honest engagement, commitment to one another's wellbeing, and a relationship of equality. Welcoming is all about mutual upbuilding, not just one person who is superior doing or saying something for another's own good. If it is not mutual, such a relationship will almost always be destructive. (See "Paul's World: Friendship," p. 10.)

1. Can you remember a best friend who disappointed you or was disappointed by you? Go as far back in your childhood as you need to in order to remember such an event. What happened to that relationship? Was it restored? Are you still friends? If not, are you able to reach out in a welcoming way to build up that person—and yourself—now? How might you and your friend grow from such outreach?

What connections do you see between that meaning and the understanding of friendship and up-building in Paul? How are they similar? How are they different?

#### IF TIME PERMITS: MARTIN LUTHER'S WORDS

In the Small Catechism, Martin Luther gives his meaning for the eighth commandment:

"We should fear and love God that we may not deceitfully belie, betray, slander, or defame our neighbor, but defend him, [think and] speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything."



Notice that an upbuilding relationship is not about attraction of personalities or even shared experiences or preferences. It is not about emotions. The toe, after all, does not have to like the neck. The eye does not have to feel warmly about the ankle. Their working together, however, is essential. And all the members work together for the common good of the whole and the good of each other.

2. A circle in a congregation near Chicago was an amazing group of women who lived these words of Paul. The women had shared many experiences over years of knowing one another. Many were widows and had suffered through the illness and death of a beloved spouse together. Many had themselves been ill or struggled with children's troubles. They had come to know how to treat one another: Different as they were from each other, their commitment to one another was unquestionable. Have you ever had an experience of this kind of group? Can you describe it?
3. Let your imagination go. What would it be like if your congregation embraced Paul's model of Christian community? What might it be like if Christians were able to embrace friendship as a model? How might we work through differences or difficulties more productively? Take notes. Share your ideas. What would it take to help such a model take root among us?

### Christ Working Through Me

Paul has been very clear that his calling is a gift from God. Paul knows that it is God who has called him to bring the message of God's grace through Christ Jesus to Gentiles. That calling is validated, confirmed, for Paul by the presence of the Holy Spirit among people who had not known God. It is also made visible when people begin to live a life that is about mutual upbuilding, gratitude to God, and willingness to claim Jesus as Lord. As he draws this long letter to a close he comes back to some details of his life as an evangelist.

4. What validates or confirms our own callings? What do you take to be your calling as a believer right now?

It is good for us to read Paul's words in 15:14: "I myself feel confident about you, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another."

In other words, he says, "you don't really need me." It was true, of course, that the Romans didn't need Paul. After all, he had not established the mission in Rome; he had never been there. So he was right to tread lightly lest people begin to wonder, "Who's this guy coming in to tell us what to do?" But Paul believes that he is called to build up Christ's body through friendship, even with Gentiles. It is right in line with the model of friendship he has developed in these chapters. When people are friends according to that wonderful ancient understanding, they owe each other every possible word and deed to build each other up.

Paul believes that he has addressed the Romans in order to build them up as people of God. It is this conviction of his calling to be a friend that allows him to speak boldly or confidently (verse 15). His boldness is strengthened by more than his calling to be a friend: His boldness (or confidence, another way of translating the same Greek word) comes by God's grace for God's grace.

In verse 18 Paul makes clear that everything that he has done in bringing Gentiles to the worship of God in Christ has been done through Christ. He is almost driven by that Spirit to get the word out as quickly and thoroughly as possible.

5. Have you ever felt empowered to speak boldly or with confidence? What was the situation? What was your message? How was it received?

Paul also shares his plans and dreams. He has a vision for mission that reaches to the ends of the earth, as

he understands that. At the same time, he is willing to postpone that long-range outreach in order to make the strong connections between the new, mostly Gentile groups of believers and the original Jewish believers in Jerusalem.

6. What are Paul's plans? Read Romans 15 and jot down a list of what he hopes to do. If you have a map in your Bible, look at the places Paul still wishes to go.

It is easy to miss how important verses 25–28 are in this letter. These verses may not sound as theological as some of the other language in Romans, yet we must hear the deep theological commitments that underlie it. In fact, these verses are an example of most of what Paul has said previously. Take a moment to read these verses together.

Why are they so important?

First of all, Paul assumes that all believers are members of Christ's body. Because of this, all believers must contribute to the common good or the body fails. The care of the poor in Jerusalem is the business of all the saints in Greece and among all assemblies of believers, even as far away as Rome.

Secondly, Paul makes clear that in the body of Christ, the distinction between Jew and Gentile is no longer important. What is important is always how each member contributes to the building up of all members of the body, wherever they live, whatever their previous religious life had been. This was a shocking idea in the ancient world where people only took care of their own, whether their own family or the poor of their own kind in their own city.

Third, Paul does not see a conflict between spiritual and material blessings. Human beings are whole in their needs. Those sanctified in Christ (that is, the saints), those baptized into Christ's death, are not called to separate human needs into levels of value and decide to which needs they will attend. God loves us,

body and all. Christ came to save us, body and all. By the power of the Spirit, our bodies can live a life shaped by that Spirit. At the same time, we live in our bodies.

Finally, Paul once again speaks of the debt owed by the Gentiles to their Jewish forebears in faith (verse 27). After the long development of his thinking in Romans 9–11, Paul reminds his hearers in 11:28 that Jews who do not believe in Christ are still "beloved by God for the sake of their ancestors." Those Jews who have come to believe in Christ are simply fellow believers in need. In both cases gratitude is owed, gratitude expressed by service.

#### IF TIME PERMITS: LITURGY AND SERVICE

When Paul speaks of owing service in Romans 15:27, he uses the Greek word that gives us the English word *liturgy*. Usually when we go to Sunday service or a funeral service or a marriage service, we don't think about our liturgy as the kind of service that Paul speaks of in Romans 15:27. Paul uses this same word in 2 Corinthians 9:12 and Philippians 2:17, 30. Read these additional verses from Paul's writings and consider the following questions: How is service related to liturgy in our congregations? Do you think the connection between serving all members of Christ's body and worshiping God is made clear in our worship services? If so, where does that interconnection show forth? If not, how might we highlight the connection so that our services of worship and our service to one another are seen as the inseparable realities that they are?

We dare not end these chapters without highlighting Paul's final request. Part of what every believer, every assembly can do for all of us is pray. Prayer is the great gift we give one another in any circumstance.



Paul seeks the earnest prayer of all his Roman hearers so that his ministry in Jerusalem might be received in the spirit with which he brings it. We detect a note of uncertainty in Paul's request for prayer. We know from the book of Acts that Paul did go to Jerusalem and that he was not well received by all the believers there. Yet, as Paul writes this letter, all that is still in the future. Paul hopes and prays that he will continue "to win obedience from the Gentiles" (15:18), even in Spain.

Yet, he only wishes to be in accord with God's will in this ministry. The ministry does not belong to Paul. It is God's ministry, begun in covenant promises and the giving of the law, brought to a climactic point in Jesus and the giving of the Spirit, continued among and by the baptized people of God. God's ministry is also continued among Jews who do not recognize Jesus as Messiah. Paul knows that he, the Romans, and whoever else hears this letter are called by God to continue sharing that ministry. It is in our relationship with one another and with God's creation, a relationship given by God, that we find the peace to which Paul says "Amen." (verse 33).

7. Perhaps a few minutes of quiet shared reflection on where God's ministry is carried out today will remind us of the ongoing power of God's Spirit to shape lives 2000 years later.

If you have time, two good questions to consider are: How do we identify a ministry as "God's ministry"? What kind of peace is it that Paul believes God gives?

## Closing

### Hymn

"Will You Come and Follow Me," *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 798, verse 1

### Prayer

In the words of Paul, from his letter to the Philippians: "May that peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen."

### Looking Ahead

In our last session we will look at how Paul closes his letter and what we can learn from it. We will also look backward at the letter as a whole to see what ideas emerge most strongly for us. In the time between now and your next session, look back over Romans as a whole. What insights do you have about this letter now? What big questions come to you? It might help to keep a notepad handy to jot down your thoughts to bring to the next session. 🌿

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## Coming soon!

IN THE JUNE AND JULY/AUGUST ISSUES

### Summer Bible study

"PRAY ALWAYS"

By The Rev. Gladys G. Moore

Session 1: Persistence

Session 2: Waiting with Patience and Hope

Session 3: Power

STARTING IN SEPTEMBER

### The 2010–2011 nine-session Bible study

"THE PEOPLE OF GOD: UNITY IN THE MIDST OF DIVERSITY"

By the Revs. Linda Johnson Seyenkulo and D. Jensen Seyenkulo

This study looks at what unites us and defines us as people of faith. The theme verse is Amos 3:3: "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" (KJV)



WE RECOMMEND

## Resources for action, advocacy, programs, or further study

*Compiled from sources including the ELCA News Service, Seeds for the Parish, and [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org)*

### **Bold Connections: An e-newsletter for Women of the ELCA**

*Bold Connections* is a way for any Women of the ELCA participant to receive regular, timely news and information from the churchwide organization. No matter what your role, you'll find helpful news and information on our programs and activities, and insight into the churchwide organization's part in our total mission and ministry together. Issues have featured new resources, a link to video of Women of the ELCA President Beth Wrenn's address to the Churchwide Assembly, information on scholarship and grant recipients, and more. Signing up is easy. Go to our home page, [www.womenoftheelca.org](http://www.womenoftheelca.org), and fill in the Bold Connections box on the right side.

### **Be the first to call a young pastor**

A new DVD resource and discussion guide for churches going through pastoral transitions is available to congregations by calling 800-638-3522, ext. 2700. *Becoming a Vital First Call Congregation* guides churches that might consider offering seminary graduates their first call to public ministry.

Through a grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc., researchers in ELCA Vocation and Education examined 14 "exemplary" first-call congregations. The resulting case studies offer useful information about congregational practices and perspectives that lead to healthy and life-giving first calls. Several lay leaders speak honestly about their experiences with a first-call congregation.

The congregational leaders talk about key themes such as nurturing, connecting, flexibility, partner relationships, and spirituality. A packet with the DVD and accompanying discussion guide is available for \$10 to cover material and mailing costs. You can also borrow a copy from your local ELCA Resource Center.

### **Start your meeting off right**

The Three Stations is a free readiness resource offered on the Women of the ELCA Web site. The 30- to 40-minute tool is for group meetings and can be used at the beginning of a retreat, workshop, gathering, or other group time. It's a meditative approach for participants to clear their minds and become open and ready for their time together. The process of the three stations is designed to help each individual to do what she "needs to do" to get the most out of the group experience.

Visit our Web site ([www.womenoftheelca.org](http://www.womenoftheelca.org)) to find this and many other free resources for group and individual use.

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# Church in Society: *A Lutheran Perspective*

by Roger A. Willer

## INTRODUCTION

### AFFIRMATIONS

- § The Gospel and the Church
- § The Church Universal
- § The Church 'In' But Not 'From' the World
- § The Church's Responsibility in Society
- § The Baptismal Vocation of Christians
- § A Community of Moral Deliberation

### COMMITMENTS

- § Sustaining Vocation
- § Witnessing as an Institution
- § Deliberating on Social Questions

### GOD'S FAITHFUL LOVE [CONCLUSION]

### ENDNOTES

*Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective* is available for download at [www.elca.org/socialstatements](http://www.elca.org/socialstatements). You can order a free printed copy online at that address or by calling 800-638-3522, ext. 2996. Multiple copies can be ordered for a small cost from Augsburg Fortress by calling 800-328-4648 or go to [www.augsburgfortress.org](http://www.augsburgfortress.org). (Item #69-2102)

My mother used to talk about a good Lutheran boy she knew while growing up who had “can you believe it, gone into politics?!” When I asked her why that was hard to believe, she said that she had been taught in church that it was misguided, even shocking, that Lutherans would get involved in that “messy” business. It was part of a “kingdom” with which Christians should have little to do. (The reference to kingdom is from the Lutheran idea that God governs the world through two different “kingdoms” or governances. The first is the kingdom of Christ while the second is the kingdom of the civil realm. God governs both, but in different ways.)

This leads to a question: What is the appropriate way for Lutheran Christians to be active in society? Why and how should each individual, congregation, synod, leader, and the churchwide expression operate in the public arena?

The very first social statement adopted by the ELCA provides



*Over the next few months, Lutheran Woman Today will highlight the 10 social statements adopted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America since 1991. Social statements are social teaching and policy documents, adopted by a churchwide assembly in accordance with ELCA policies and procedures.*

answers. (For a review of what social statements are and how they come about, see “Being a Public Church” in *LWT*, September 2009.)

## CALLED BY GOD

The accompanying box (at left) outlines the headings in the statement and provides clues to the points it makes. The first concerns our motivation: Because the Gospel of Jesus Christ liberates us from sin, death, and evil, the church as the body of Christ is freed to “love the neighbor” (Matthew 22:36). This includes all of us because *all* of the baptized are the church.

The statement goes on to say that the church’s identity is to confess and teach both law and gospel as the living word of the triune God. Therefore it is God’s activity in the world that inevitably leads us to “participation in society and care of the earth with all its creatures.” The statement stresses that this participation involves a commitment to justice (Amos 5:24).

The statement highlights the Lutheran teaching that God is at work in the civil realm primarily through the activity of the law. Family, education, economy, government, and other social structures

are the ways God restrains evil, protects from harm, and encourages the common good. Christians are to respect the God-given integrity and tasks of these structures. Yet, since sin permeates them, too, they fall short of God’s intention for justice, peace, and care of creation.

In relation to the world, Lutheran Christians understand that the church (the body of Christ) is *in*, but not *from* the world. The church through faith (we are the church!) already takes part in the healing activity of God announced and embodied in Jesus. Yet it awaits the fulfillment of the whole creation and so lives in a tension between two ages—the present age and the age to come. Christians share a common destiny with the whole world in the coming reign of God and yet can never be fully at home in the world as it is. Christians must always be restless.

## THE COMMON GOOD

God’s restless church is called to serve and advocate (speak on behalf of and with those in need) in responding to particular social situations. Such situations are diverse. They include disasters, poverty, various forms of discrimination,

social policies, economic arrangements, and more.

The statement says the church should keep enough critical distance from the society to act, when appropriate, like the prophets of Scripture. The prophets challenged the culture, exposed the power of sin and idolatry, and spoke out on behalf of the poor and powerless. Christians are committed to society for the sake of the common good and this means they must be ready to speak for change.

*“It is through a public process guided by the Holy Spirit that Christians come to discern what action should be taken when they are dealing with complicated issues.”*

As organizations and institutions that live in these two ages the congregations, synods, Women of the ELCA, social ministry organizations, and churchwide expression all have particular roles in addressing society.

The churchwide expression through the Church in Society unit, for instance, is charged with bring-

ing together a task force to lead the participatory process of creating social statements. Yet the statement is quite clear that *the number one way* the church (we are the church!) carries out its responsibility in the world is through the everyday life of ordinary Christians.

### COMPLICATED ISSUES

The statement explains that the baptismal vocation of every Christian is to participate in society by doing good in our places of responsibility—marriage, family, work, school, volunteer associations, community organizations, political parties, and so forth. It affirms that this is the number one way that God works through the church in the public arena. For this reason, congregations and other places of ministry are to be committed to sustaining the baptismal vocation of ELCA members.

But how will we know what is good or right in the complex issues of today? Here the statement puts forward what was a very new idea in 1991. Part of the ELCA's identity and task is to be a "community of moral deliberation." This community looks together to Scripture as the normative source and to the best knowledge available in the secular realm when it deliberates toward good actions and policies.

Christians fulfill their vocation diversely and have many different gifts, so they will often disagree passionately on the kind of responses they make to social questions. Lutheran congregations, campus ministries, synods, and the church-wide expression are united with Christ so that they can celebrate this diversity and are free to be particular places of lively deliberation. It is through a public process guided by the Holy Spirit that Christians come to discern what action should be taken when they are dealing with complicated issues.

### MORAL DELIBERATION

The statement prescribes that the way we talk and with whom we talk is critical. Deliberation means reading Scripture for its wisdom and it means considering facts together, but especially with those who may disagree. The statement specifies that deliberation should include the voices of those who have particular interests at stake or who suffer from the consequences. For instance, this commits our church to seeking out people of diverse and differing perspectives, experiences, and competencies when we compose a social statement task force or when congregations hold forums and discussions. Communities of deliberation

should be lively places! This is how the Holy Spirit comes to be heard.

The year this statement was adopted, 1991, was very early in the life of the ELCA. The passage of *Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective* responded to the need for a foundational statement about how ELCA Christians could participate in society from a Lutheran theological base. Its affirmations and commitments have guided the ELCA into becoming a more public church. Yet the aspirations expressed in the statement beckon us to strive always to live *more faithfully* into its vision of faith active in love seeking justice in society. ☸

**The Rev. Dr. Roger A. Willer** is director for the Department for Studies in ELCA Church in Society.

## ELCA SOCIAL STATEMENTS

- Abortion (1991)
- Church in Society (1991)
- Death Penalty (1991)
- Economic Life (1999)
- Education (2007)
- Environment (1993)
- Health and Health Care (2003)
- Peace (1995)
- Race, Ethnicity & Culture (1993)
- Sexuality (2009)





## RACE NOTES

# The Hospitality Challenge

by Linda Post Bushkofsky



**New to the area,** I visited a Lutheran congregation alone one Sunday. After worship ended, I headed to the parking lot. As I was leaving I kept hearing a “ma’am, ma’am” behind me. I finally realized someone was calling me. When I stopped, a woman ran up to me and said “you have a great voice; you must join our choir.” No “Hello, are you a visitor here?” or anything like that. Just an assault-like, “you must join our choir.” It wasn’t the best method of extending hospitality! I explained I was just visiting, and the woman turned and walked away.

I went on to visit several other Lutheran congregations, trying to find a new church home. Very rarely did anyone in the congregation greet or welcome me. I filled in pew pads and signed communion cards. Only one congregation followed up, putting me on its newsletter mailing list. I found it hard to believe that no one contacted me. I was motivated to join a congregation, but imagine if I had not been?

This has sometimes been my experience within Women of the ELCA, too. I’ve seen church bulletins that announce something like “The Martha Circle will meet at Mary Smith’s house next Tuesday.” If I wanted to check out the Martha Circle, that announcement wouldn’t help much. What does the Martha Circle do? Where does Mary live? What time will the group meet? I’ve also attended synodical conventions where few women greet or welcome me. After I’ve given a keynote address, I’ll often have women

speak with me, but rarely before they know who I am.

I have two challenges for you. The first is in your congregation. Take the risk and speak with a woman that you don’t know very well. Tell her what the women’s organization has meant to you. Give her last month’s *LWT*. Invite her to attend your next Women of the ELCA function. Give her a reminder call. Repeat this each month with a different woman. Encourage other women to join you in doing the same thing.

The second challenge takes place at your synodical convention. A member of the churchwide executive board will be attending your synodical convention, representing Beth Wrenn, our churchwide president. That board member is there as much to listen as she is there to share information. Practice extending hospitality to her. She is a resource for you, so seek her out. As is true with any extension of hospitality, both you and she will be blessed.

I should note that I have had wonderful hospitality extended to me at many Women of the ELCA functions, and I have seen that same hospitality extended to lots of other women too. Only a small fraction of the women who are members of ELCA congregations, however, participate in our organization. To grow this organization and help other women act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ, you and I must continue to extend hospitality. 🌿

**Linda Post Bushkofsky** is executive director of Women of the ELCA.





AMEN!

## Sometimes, like Today

by Catherine Malotky

### Oh, God. You gave me

a gift, small, but treasured. Today, as I prepared for worship, from the choir's place I faced the door of the church. I watched the early morning parade of parishioners arriving to take their places, to join in song and prayer together, to welcome, and to eat and drink. They came in small groups, early arrivals lingering outside the door to greet one another and renew their acquaintance after a week away.

The infant who would later be baptized arrived with his entourage—proud parents and grandparents, trailing nieces and nephews, all with heightened anticipation on this, his big day. They positioned themselves in the sanctuary so that everyone could see when it was his moment at the font.

I watched the ushers welcome all. I know these two. They have not been members long, but they are steadfast church people, exercising their gifts on behalf of the community. They welcomed with loving embrace a newly widowed one, who came to church today still painfully alone. But when he entered worship, he was alone no longer. Here he is surrounded by friends who know of his grief and pray for him all week long.

These ushers welcomed him at the door, setting the tone, delivering the bulletin, pointing out places to sit. He would be embraced by another and another once inside, his grief borne by friends.

Such losses are worn by so many here. A child lost years ago. Health stolen in the prime of life. A partner away


at war. A job downsized. A hope disappointed. A belief questioned.

Yet, here we gather, to try to be the church together, to bear one another's burdens, to love one another with mutual affection, to live honorably as in this day, to put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is rarely perfect, this community. Sometimes the morning is early, the zeal is subdued, the ushers are tired, and we nurse disappointments in each other.

But sometimes, like today, when the water in the font is stirred and we welcome a new one into our midst . . . sometimes, like today, when we gather to receive the bread and wine, hands eager to receive . . . and the preaching hits home and the music moves the heart . . . sometimes, I am able to glimpse God, what you have in mind when you call us together.

Can I be an emissary of this grace to the world around me? Can I invite others to come to this place? Can I embody in the world your vision of welcome, hope, and honor? Can I be a mirror of your love for all, not just among those I know, but beyond my own reach to the world of your creating?

Open my eyes to the wonder of your love, God. Give me a heart that celebrates rather than competes, honors rather than judges, includes rather than excludes. Give me a vision of you, tomorrow emptied, loose in the world. Amen. 

**The Rev. Catherine Malotky** serves the ELCA Board of Pensions as retirement planning manager. An ordained pastor, she has also been an editor, teacher, parish pastor, and retreat leader.





From left are: Doris Anderson, Trudy Disselhorst, Dana Roberts (chair), Molly Hall, Karen Cowles, Laurie Reynolds, Marcheta Holmly, and Kim Oswald. Not pictured are Nancy Ingman, Pam Dugmore, Belinda Simoniti, Alice Titus, and snowbirds Glenda Peacock and Barbara Beerman.

Scraps and Prayers, the Women of the ELCA quilting group at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Encinitas, Calif., have met every Wednesday since 1991 making “no fewer than 70 quilts a year” to send to Lutheran World Relief and local organizations. The group also makes prayer quilts for the congregation’s sick, school kits, and occasionally layettes, health kits, and sewing kits. “We have a 92-year-old lady and some young people, too,” writes Trudy Disselhorst. Another group in the church makes pajamas for needy children.

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